DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 534 FL 015 149

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TITLE Evaluation of the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (19th, New York, April 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communicative Competence (Languages); Curriculum Design; *English (Second Language); *Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; Learning Strategies; *Problem Solving; *Program Effectiveness; *Second Language Instruction; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Bangalore Communicational Teaching Proj (India)

ABSTRACT

The Bangalore Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) in India operates on the central tenet that in English instruction, form can be acquired through a focus on meaning alone, that a grammatical system can be assimilated unconsciously if the mind is engaged in trying to understand or convey meaning. Linguistic specification is not used in CTP, and the curriculum is composed of a series of problem-solving tasks, each having a sequence of rehearsal, student effort, and feedback. There is little interaction among students and no technology, texts, or special seating plan are used. An evaluation of the program was undertaken to determine whether there were any demonstrable differences between students of this program and students in ordinary instructional settings. The evalution methodology was found to have problems in experimental control and in comparability of testing of the treatment groups. It is concluded that use of observe-correlate-experiment procedures currently given prominence in educational research methodology would provide a better measure of such a program than the measures used in this evaluation. (MSE)

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Evaluation of the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project

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Paper presented at the 19th Annual Convention of TESOL, New York, April, 1985

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Introduction

The Bangalore project has emerged in recent years as a focal point in debate concerning communicative curricula, partly because of its extreme position vis-a-vis unconscious learning strategies, and partly because of the nature of its development. Howatt perhaps sums up the strength of the impact it has made (in India and in Britain, at least) when he says that, "Bangalore has set the context for one of the most interesting arguments of the eighties, if not beyond." (1984:288).

In this paper, we will be considering the project primarily from the perspective of evaluation, but before we do so, it may be helpful to give a very brief account of the Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) itself. So the paper will comprise the following elements:

1. First of all, we will give an abbreviated description of what happens in CTP classrooms.
2. Secondly, we will present a report of the evaluation.
3. Finally we will discuss the merits and limitations of that evaluation- in other words, evaluate the evaluation-and make proposals for further study of the CTP.

The CTP classroom

The CTP has already been described in a number of publications (Johnson 1982; Brumfit 1984a and 1984b; Beretta forthcoming). Also, the project originator and director, N.S.Prabhu, has given talks at various conferences, including TESOL in 1982. Therefore, what we propose to do is to assume that the basic issues are already familiar, and to confine ourselves to a mere summary of the project's methodology and then to

look at short extracts of both CTP and 'structural' lessons in South India.

The central tenet of the CTP is that form can be acquired through a focus on meaning alone, that a grammatical system can be assimilated unconsciously if the mind is engaged in trying to understand or convey meaning. Prabhu puts it this way:

"What we are saying is not 'English for Communication' but 'English through Communication', not 'learn English so that you will be able to do and say things later', but 'say and do things now so that as a result you will learn English.' " (Prabhu 1980:23).

In other words, the CTP does away with linguistic specification altogether, whether structural, notional, or functional. Instead the curriculum comprises a series of problem-solving activities, called 'tasks'.

Through a long process of trial and error, the project team developed literally hundreds of tasks. Incidentally, it was not assumed from the outset that these tasks would all be of the problem-solving type. Originally, role-playing, dramatisation and story-completion were also considered, but classroom experience revealed that the best reactions were obtained with less open-ended tasks in which there is a reliance on reasoning rather than on affect.

Hence, the tasks are based on solving problems related to map-reading, timetables, schedules, regulations, and so on, rather than on expressing feelings or opinions. Each task is preceded by a rehearsal which makes known the nature of the task, brings relevant language into play, and allows some learners to learn from attempts made by others. The task itself is a period of self-reliant effort by each learner to achieve a clearly perceived goal, and is followed by a feedback session in which an indication is given to

learners as to their success on the task.

There is little interaction among students, largely because it would constitute a break with convention unacceptable to typical teachers, but also because of anxiety that it might produce pidginisation. There is no technology in the classroom, no textbooks are used, and no special seating arrangement has been devised. Altogether, it may seem a rather austere approach, but that is hardly the impression we formed of the classroom climate.

Let us now turn briefly to samples of interactional exchanges from both CTP and Structural classes:

The first extract is from a CTP class, focussing on distances on a map. (See Figure 1 below.)

INSERT FIGURE 1

Extract 1: A CTP lesson about Distances on a Map

T: Now these are the names of some towns and cities. All right?

P: Yes sir.

T: Nagpur, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Trichy.

P: Trichy, sir; where is Trichy?

T: Trichy is the name of a town in Tamil Nadu state. Have you heard of a place called 'Srirangam'?

P: What is Srirangam?...Srirangapatna...?

T: Not 'Srirangapatna'. Srirangam is very close to Trichy, just two or three kilometres from Trichy. Now, I'm going to ask you some questions. Will you be able to answer those questions?

P: (in chorus) Yes sir.

T: Now, Geetanjali. How far is it from Nagpur to Calcutta?

P: 900 km

P: 900 km. Good. Sit down. Madhura, how far is Bombay from Madras?

P: 600 (noise from other pupils-indecipherable) 500.

T: Five hundred kilometres. Good. Now, Yeshoda, how far is Trichy from Nagpur by way of Madras?

P: (Requests for question to be repeated; various guesses, 200, 800, 1000 km, but the girl addressed remains silent).

T: Come here; you just come here. How far is Trichy from...

P: Sir, 800.

T: Nagpur to Madras is eight hundred kilometres, yes. And how far...

P: Sir, Madras to Trichy two hundred.

T: Yes, madras to Trichy is two hundred kilometres, and Nagpur to Madras is eight hundred kilometres. Therefore, how far is it from Nagpur to Trichy by way of Madras?

P: 1000

Extract 2: Structural lesson focussing on 'enough' and 'too'.

T: Come here. What's this?

P: Board. (in chorus): Blackboard.

T: Heavy blackboard or a very light blackboard?

P: Heavy blackboard.

T: How do you know? You don't know... Try to lift it. Can you lift the blackboard up? No, you can't. Can I lift the blackboard up?

P: Yes (in chorus).

T: But it's **too** heavy for you to lift the blackboard. It's too heavy for you to lift. You can't lift the blackboard. It's too heavy for you to lift. Or: You are not strong enough to lift the blackboard. I'm strong enough to lift the blackboard. Can I lift the blackboard?

P: (In chorus): Yes.

T: Which of you can lift the blackboard? Which of you can lift the blackboard? Shenbagam, can you lift the blackboard? Can you? Is she strong enough to lift the blackboard?

P: (In chorus): Yes, yes.

T: You guess so. Right? Is she strong enough to lift the blackboard?

P: (In chorus): Yes.

T: Yes, she is. Am I strong enough to lift the blackboard?

P: (In chorus): Yes.

T: Is Sailasree strong enough to lift the blackboard?

P: No.

T: Is Anuradha strong enough to lift the blackboard?

P: No.

T: Is she very weak?

P: Yes.

T: No, she's not weak. She's not strong enough to lift the blackboard. She's not strong enough to lift the blackboard. I'm strong enough to lift the blackboard and I'm tall.

Evaluation

The stated purpose in seeking the evaluation was:

"To assess through appropriate tests, whether there is any demonstrable difference in terms of attainment in English between classes of children who have been taught on the CT Project and their peers who have received normal instruction in the respective schools." (Prabhu 1983: personal communication).

Following a feasibility study by Davies (1983), the first author went out to India early in 1984 to carry out the evaluation.(We will only describe the evaluation in an abbreviated form here, as it has been reported more fully in Beretta and Davies (1985) and Beretta

(Forthcoming).) Our brief was to compare the CTP with an Indian version of the structural method, in terms of pupil achievement. Given this brief, there were two major problems facing the evaluation: firstly, to control the investigation in a way that would be experimentally valid, and secondly, to devise tests that would be equally fair to both teaching approaches. Four schools agreed to take part in the evaluation (and their characteristics are described in Appendix 4).

The first problem, then, concerned experimental control. As is well-known, a 'true' experiment would require subjects to be randomly assigned to experimental and control classes, to ensure initial equivalence of comparison groups. However, since the project did not incorporate evaluation into its original design, it was necessary to conduct a less rigourous, quasi-experiment involving intact classes. (Incidentally, this is by no means a criticism of the CTP--after all, it was not trying out an established 'package'; it evolved its methodology on site, and it was only later that the prospect of external evaluation was considered).

Nevertheless, precisely because full experimental control was lacking, it is crucial that the specific variables the chosen design failed to control be made explicit. To this end, a checklist of factors that could pose a threat to both internal and external validity has been drawn up (and is presented in Appendix 1).

Obviously, the desideratum of any experiment is that it should be strong in both types of validity. Internal validity refers to factors which may directly affect the test scores, while external validity is concerned with degree of generalisability. However, it may be seen from the checklist that for internal validity there are question marks indicating possible sources of concern with regard

to instrumentation, selection, and mortality. The most problematic factor was mortality, or attrition, with regard to the T.Nagar school (note the minus sign). In this school, a number of students in one group failed to turn up to the evaluation tests, and the constitution of one of the groups had maintained its stability over time in a way that the other group had not. Interpretation of the T.Nagar results, therefore, is particularly difficult, and they do not influence the confirmation or rejection of hypotheses

With reference to external validity, it is clear that the major difficulty is in the area of reactive arrangements, which preclude generalisations about the effect of the teaching method upon subjects being exposed to it in a non-experimental setting. In our four schools, there are two ingredients which might have produced this effect:

Firstly, the Hawthorne effect: there was a great deal of observation of CTP classes over the five years of the project, which may have had an influence on motivation.

Secondly, the teacher variable: in three of the four schools, the CTP groups were taught by unfamiliar teachers who were also better qualified. Irrespective of whether or not more highly qualified teachers get better results, what is relevant here is simply the fact that this variable remained uncontrolled.

So much for our first problem - experimental control. The second problem centered around the tests themselves.

It is evident that if the made use of tests that were CTP-based, that would be unfair to the structural control groups, and vice-versa. In an attempt to overcome this problem, we decided to construct a battery of tests intended to measure both achievement (through a

structure test and a CTP task-based test) and proficiency (via three syllabus-neutral tests: contextualised-grammar, dictation, and listening/reading comprehension). (For samples of these tests, see Appendix 3).

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were advanced as follows:

1. There is a difference in the language abilities arising from form-focussed teaching and those arising from meaning-focussed teaching. If this were so, each group would perform significantly better on its own achievement test.
2. Acquisition of structure is best achieved without focus on form. For this to be supported, experimental classes would have to do significantly better than control classes on the contextualised-grammar and dictation tests.
3. Structure acquired without focus on form is more readily available for deployment than structure learned with focus on form. Confirmation of this would require CTP groups to score significantly higher than control groups on the test of listening/reading comprehension.

Results

Space forbids a full consideration of results in this paper, (but see Beretta, forthcoming). For the moment, however, we may look at a summary of the results by focussing on patterns of significance. (See Appendix 2).

A glance at the table reveals certain trends. First of all, both groups did significantly better on their own achievement tests, thereby bearing out the first hypothesis. If, as mentioned earlier, we do not attempt to interpret the T.Nagar results, the third hypothesis is also borne out. However, as may be seen from the table, the results

do not fully confirm the second (and central) hypothesis, although the trend is evidently in favour of the experimental groups. In no case do the control groups perform better on any measure other than their own achievement test. We might add that a possible rationalisation of the ragged pattern of results is that the tests themselves were reasonably unbiased.

In short, the results manifest a pattern which is consistent with the demands of the first and third hypotheses, and in part consistent with the second. However, the impossibility of adequate experimental control and the potential for bias in test construction preclude firm conclusions. Also, since no group of learners has been exposed to the CTP treatment for more than three years, this study cannot sanction any statement about the CTP method at later stages of learning. These limitations once admitted, we consider that the results provide tentative support for the CTP claim that grammar construction can take place through a focus on meaning alone.

Evaluation of Evaluation

We would like now to discuss what the implications of this evaluation could possibly be.

Once again, we note the impossibility of controlling extraneous variables, the acknowledgement of limitations, and the conclusions that come not with a bang but with a tentative whimper: the language of constraint that we have come to know so well in evaluation reports. This raises many of the familiar questions about the suitability of comparative experiment for such complex behaviour as that involved in teaching and learning, of imposing a design intended for <u>nature</u> on <u>culture</u> . In Bangalore, we had no prospect of establishing causality. That is to say, the fact that true experimental design was impossible meant that from the outset we knew that there was no chance of

establishing the innovative method as the factor responsible for student achievement. And yet, we took as much care as we could to adhere to experimental procedures. One could be forgiven for asking "Why bother?".

This strategy of self-criticism is by no means gratuitous. It's part of a wider recognition that, to date, we have little reason to place confidence in the findings of evaluations in general. So far, we can say that we know that, by and large, time spent learning a language has some bearing on achievement, and that teaching is better than no teaching; which is a small return for so many years of research. Our investigations have either been too uncontrolled - Keating (1963), for example - or too contrived to have much relevance for the classroom (Levin (1972)). But the inadequacy of our research into method effectiveness has often been observed, from Carroll (1963), through Allwright (1972) to Stern (1983), and we do not propose to cover the same ground here. However, the upshot of all this is that we are not in a position to insist that an innovator should specify in advance what would constitute falsification of his hypothesis, when we have not yet developed a strategy that would reliably and validly secure the appropriate information.

Evaluation is so accustomed to not delivering the goods that language teachers have never come to expect it. So what can our reports be used for? Abuse, it might be supposed, is a kind of use - a colleague in Edinburgh recalls a teacher-training lecturer breezing in one morning, waving a copy of the report of the Pennsylvania Project, proclaiming: 'Audiolingualism is dead. Proof! It's all in here.' But does evaluation have a more positive function? Eisner thinks not; he says "I believe our propensity to change practice is the function of the attractiveness of a set of ideas, rather than the rigor of a body of data-based conclusions." (Eisner 1984: 449).

Of course, it is easy enough to dispense tokens of despondency. The question is, what did the Bangalore evaluation achieve, if it could not address the question of causality? We think it enabled us to say that there is a coarse correlation between membership of CTP classes and achievement, such as has been described, on a certain battery of tests. In our view, this is more substantial than anecdote, which is sufficient justification for undertaking the investigation in the first place.

But we would not wish to rest the case there, as it seems that there is some prospect for more fruitful inquiry. A design for a follow-up study of the CTP will now be suggested, (bearing always in mind H.L.Mencken's remark that 'For every complex problem, there is a simple solution that is wrong.').

In educational research, especially in the fields of mathematics and reading, there has been considerable achievement in recent years. Gage (1984), Berliner (1984), Brophy (1979) and Medley (1982) all concur that research can now point to the beginnings of an empirically established knowledge base. Berliner claims that, "For the first time teacher education has a scientific foundation." (1984: 94). This has been achieved by a series of studies adhering to the observe-correlate-experiment loop recommended by Rosenshine and Furst (1973).

"The paradigm contains at least these elements:

1. development of procedures for describing teaching in a quantitative manner;
2. correlational studies in which the descriptive variables are related to measures of student growth;
3. experimental studies in which the significant variables obtained in the correlational studies are tested in a more controlled situation."

(Rosenshine and Furst 1973: 122).

To date, nine such studies have yielded experimental results (cited in Gage 1984), and we will describe one of them to exemplify the

procedure. Good and Grouws (1977) carried out a large observational study and correlated features of teacher behaviour with student outcomes on a standardised test of mathematics. Those features found to be most effective were combined into a program which was compared (Good and Grouws, 1979) with a control treatment, systematically observed for implementation, and related to results on both standardised and content tests; and found to be significantly more effective.

The experimental phase, it should be pointed out, did not involve single variables but a package or a complex of variables; it did not take place in a contrived 'laboratory' setting, but in normal classrooms; it did not abbreviate duration to a few hours, but considered the effects over time. What is most important is that the experiment managed to remain tightly controlled in such 'natural' circumstances. All of the nine experiments have followed these general procedures. They also occured in a large enough number of schools to form a statistical quorum.

Stern (1983) remarked that we had a lot to gain from a closer inspection of educational research, and we would like to echo that observation. Of course, we are not saying that we should simply map any successful educational format onto language teaching research. And, of course, all educational research is subject-specific, and we have been right to insist that what is good for content subjects is not necessarily good for ours. However, our declaration of independence need not proscribe inspection of relevant issues in other spheres of education.

Specifically, we can say that the recent gains that have been made with the observe-correlate-experiment strategy could have implications for us, too. And we may consider with interest that experiments that we loosely call large-scale <u>can</u> be controlled and conducted successfully, and that systematic observation and

correlation provide an essential preparation for, and supplement to, experiments attempting to make a statement about causality.

Coming back to the CTP - at this stage, we do not know what the critical features of the approach are. If we recall the CTP lesson extract, we may have had difficulty in distinguishing it from a structural lesson focussing on 'how far?'. After all, in the full extract, the teacher says 'how far?' 15 times, and the pupils, 7 times. So, we might wish to argue that what distinguishes it from a structural lesson is that inference is required to answer the question. But this would imply that inference does not occur in structural classrooms, which is probably more than we would care to claim. In view of that, we might proceed to make a distinction between linguistic inference and semantic inference. Even then, we would probably find that it is not a matter of presence or absence of these features but of varying degrees of them. The point is, though, that it is only through systematic observation that we can know what constitutes a CTP lesson and identify the component elements.

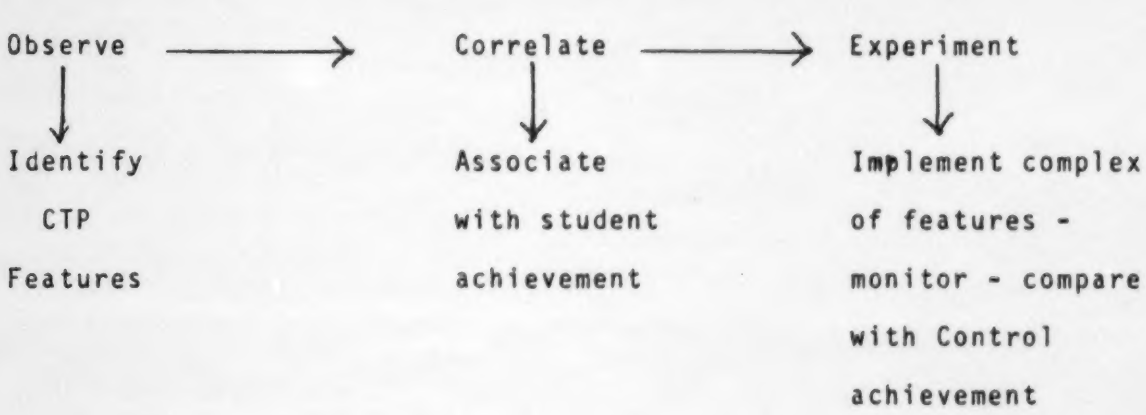
There will, of course, be a great number of features, but if we associate them with achievement, we would hope to be in a position to suspect that a certain complex of features may yield better student performance than another.

At that stage, we would be able to implement a program that adheres to this complex and compare it with a structural program under tightly-controlled conditions, where implementation is measured. Ideally, this experiment would be long term, would take place in a normal classroom setting, and involve a stastically appropriate number of schools.

To sum up, then, what we have already got is this:

CTP Student Achievement

What we need is this:



But before concluding, perhaps the ghost of Mencken should be invoked again. We may, of course, anticipate problems. Firstly, preparing an adequate observational scheme will be very difficult. Therefore, while there is a lull in CTP activities, (only one CTP-trained class remains intact), we would do well to try out our schema first. Such a troubleshooting venture would aid a more sustained and serious investigation if or when the CTP starts up again in earnest. (Such a study is, in fact, being carried out by the first author in November/December 1985).

It might be objected that the experiment outlined above could never work, and that past failures in our field should have alerted us to this clearly enough (e.g. Scherer and Wertheimer, 1964; and Smith, 1970). However, we would be entering the experiment from a position of relative strength, i.e., we would have defined our comparison treatments, and we would monitor their implementation. Furthermore, as the pioneering work in educational research has shown, there are ways of controlling such experiments, e.g. Good and Grouws (1979) found that teachers' co-operation in an experiment can be obtained by asking them for it, which contrasts with Smith's (1970) attempt to allow teachers to mistakenly believe that they had been assigned to the method of their choice.

We conclude that an adequate evaluation of the CTP might fruitfully refer to observe-correlate-experiment procedures given prominence in recent educational research.

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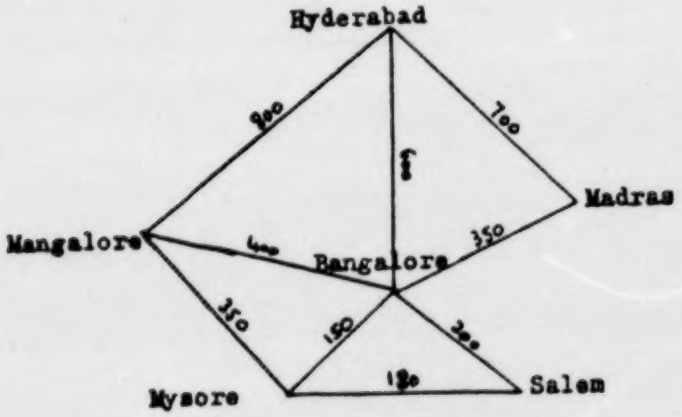
FIGURE 1

Map relating to a CTP lesson involving distances



APPENDIX 1

CHECKLIST INDICATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWELVE SOURCES OF INVALIDITY AND THE FOUR SCHOOLS

SCHOOL	SOURCES OF INVALIDITY											
	INTERNAL								EXTERNAL			
	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi	vii	viii	ix	x	xi	xii
	HISTORY	MATURATION	TESTING	INSTRUMENTATION	REGRESSION	SELECTION	MORTALITY	INTERACTION OF SELECTION AND MATURATION ETC	INTERACTION OF TESTING AND X	INTERACTION OF SELECTION AND X	REACTIVE ARRANGEMENTS	MULTIPLE - X INTERFERENCE
BANGALORE	+	+	+	?	+	?	?	+	+	?	-	+
CUDDALORE	+	+	+	?	+	?	?	+	+	?	-	+
T. NAGAR	+	+	+	?	+	?	-	+	+	?	-	+
TIRUVOTTIYUR	+	+	+	?	+	?	?	+	+	?	+	-

Note: In this table, a minus indicates a definite weakness, a plus indicates that the factor is controlled and a question mark indicates a possible source of concern.

APPENDIX 2

PATTERNS OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR FOUR SCHOOLS AND FIVE TESTS

	Test 1 (Structure)	Test 2 (Context. Grammar)	Test 3 (Dictation)	Test 4 (List & Reading)	Test 5 (Tasks)
Bangalore	C	=	E	E	E
Cuddalore	C	E*	=	E	E
T. Nagar	C	=	=	=	E
Tiruvottiyur	C	=	=	E	E

'E' indicates that the experimental group did significantly better, '=' that there was no significant difference, and 'C' that the control group did significantly better. Significance here refers to the .05 level of significance.

* except in this one case, once a school shows significance in a test in favour of E, it continues to do so and the overall pattern in the table from left to right is: C = E.

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLES OF THE TESTS

(1) Structure - This test consists of a series of multiple-choice items. The structures were drawn from the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu State syllabuses.

Example:

We _____ going to school today. It's Sunday.

a. aren't b. not c. isn't d. don't

(2) Contextualised Grammar - This comprises a number of items where the testee is required to fill in the blank with one word.

Example:

Through the window I can see my father. He can't see me because he _____ looking at the road. He is going to the market.

(3) Dictation - A short passage was dictated in the following way:

(i) reading of whole passage at conversational speed.

e.g. I have two brothers and three sisters. We all go to the same school. Sometimes we take the bus. Today we are going by bus. After school we will walk home.

(ii) one reading only of each segment at conversational speed.

(iii) final reading of whole passage at conversational speed.

(4) Listening/Reading Comprehension - This required testees to read, for example, a hotel advertisement and to write answers to spoken questions. It demanded a great deal of inference.

e.g. Text Hotel Ashok

One room only Rs 150 a day! Bring your family! In our grounds you can enjoy cricket, football and kabaddi. We have a good restaurant. English and Indian meals. Filmshow every night at 8.00pm. Write to: Hotel Ashok, 74, Gandhi Street, Delhi. Tel: 883921.

Listen carefully to the questions. You will hear each question twice. Answer the questions, using the information from the advertisement.

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e.g. Spoken question

Where is the hotel?

(5) Task-based - The test was a representative sample of the tasks used in the CTP classroom. For example, solving the problems related to a timetable and to a calendar.

APPENDIX 4

THE CLASSES TESTED

Bangalore:

(a) Experimental group: A Standard VI class of 11/12-year boys and girls at St Anthony's Kannada Upgraded Primary School, Jayanagar, T-Block, Bangalore 560 041. The class has been taught English through communicational tasks from the beginning level for two academic years (1982-83 and 1983-84: about 250 lessons in all, of 40 minutes' duration).

(b) Control group: The other Standard VI class at the same school, though it functions at a different place (for want of space in the school), about a mile away. This class too consists of 11/12 year-old boys and girls and has been taught English for the same length of time (viz two academic years) by the methods prevalent in the state.

Cuddalore:

(a) Experimental group: A Standard IV class of 9/10-year-old girls at Sacred Heart's Tamil-medium Primary School, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu. The class has been taught English through communicational tasks from the beginning level for two academic years (1982-83 and 1983-84: about 275 lessons in all, of 40 minutes' duration).

(b) Control group: One of the other two Standard IV classes at the school, consisting of 9/10-year-old girls. This class has been taught English for the same length of time by the methods prevalent in the state.

T Nagar

(a) Experimental group: A Standard V class of 10/11-year-old boys and girls at the Sri Sharada Vidyalaya Middle School, T Nagar, Madras 600 017. The class has been taught English through Communicational tasks from the beginning level for three academic years (1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84: about 380 lessons in all, of 40 minutes' duration).

(b) Control group: One of the other Standard V classes in the school, of 10/11-year-old boys and girls. This class has been taught English for the same length of time, by the methods that are prevalent in the state.

Tiruvottiyur:

(a) Experimental group: A Standard VI class of 11/12-year-old boys at the Vellayan Chettiar Higher Secondary School, Tiruvottiyur, Madras 600 019. The class has been taught English through communicational tasks for one academic year (1983-84: about 120 lessons, of 40 minutes' duration), in its 4th year of English. It had been taught English earlier for three academic years by the methods prevalent in the state.

(b) Control group: Another Standard VI class in the school, of 11/12-year-old boys. This class had been taught English for three years by the methods prevalent in the state and was taught, in the fourth year (1983-84: about 120 lessons of 40 minutes' duration) with deliberate adherence to those methods.

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